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PROMOTING ROMEO

BY
HELEN BAGG



THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA

Successful Rural Plays

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Next Play

FARM FOLKS. A Rural Play in Four Acts, by ARTHUR LEWIS TUBBS. For five male and six female characters. Time of playing, two hours and a half. One simple exterior, two easy interior scenes. Costumes, modern. Flora Goodwin, a farmer's daughter, is engaged to Philip Burleigh, a young New Yorker. Philip's mother wants him to marry a society woman, and by falsehoods makes Flora believe Philip does not love her. Dave Weston, who wants Flora himself, helps the deception by intercepting a letter from Philip to Flora. She agrees to marry Dave, but on the eve of their marriage Dave confesses, Philip learns the truth, and he and Flora are reunited. It is a simple plot, but full of speeches and situations that sway an audience alternately to tears and to laughter.

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**THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA**

Promoting Romeo

A Farce in Three Acts

By

HELEN BAGG

Author of "The Fascinating Fanny Brown," "Why Not Jim?" "Whiskers," "That Blonde Person," etc.



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Promoting Romeo

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Promoting Romeo

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JOHN FENWICK.....	<i>A well-to-do business man</i>
ELLEN FENWICK.....	<i>His wife</i>
ROBERT FENWICK.....	<i>Their son</i>
ELSIE EVANS.....	<i>A niece and ward of Mr. Fenwick's</i>
DOROTHY STEVENS.....	<i>A young widow</i>
BEN CRAIG.....	<i>Engaged to Elsie</i>
MAY CRAIG.....	<i>His young sister</i>
ROMEO BADGER.....	<i>The Fenwicks' colored chauffeur</i>
MRS. AMARILLA BADGER.....	<i>His mother</i>
ROSALIE JONES.....	<i>His sweetheart, a manicurist</i>
SELMA.....	<i>A Swedish maid</i>
A POLICEMAN.	

SYNOPSIS

Act I.—Drawing-room of the Fenwick house. Morning.

Act II.—Same setting. The following night.

Act III.—Same setting. Next morning.

TIME:—The present.

PLACE:—Any large city.

TIME OF PLAYING:—Two hours and a half.

PROPERTIES

For MRS. FENWICK: A number of letters, one containing a number of bills (twenty dollars altogether).

For MR. FENWICK: Newspaper, breakfast tray.

ELSIE EVANS: Golf bag (not necessary), tiny powder puff, engagement ring.

ROSALIE: Jaunty little apron, bag, hat, jacket or coat, manicure articles, ordinary envelope.

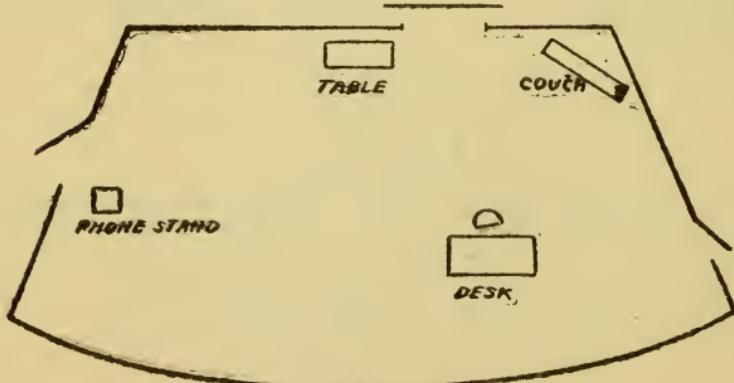
ROBERT: A newspaper, lead pencil, small change, kitchen apron, breakfast tray with dishes.

ROMEO: Small change.

MR. BADGER: Bag, telegram, parasol.

MAY: A huge feather fan.

SCENE PLOT



STORY OF THE PLAY

Robert Fenwick, son of a well-to-do business man, is hopelessly in love with Dorothy Stevens, a fascinating young widow. His father objects to the marriage because Robert has never shown that he could really earn a living. But Mr. Fenwick says that he will consent to the match if the boy proves that he can make good. After many extenuating circumstances, ludicrous mishaps and misunderstandings, Robert shows that he has the right stuff in him and wins Dorothy for a wife.

Promoting Romeo

ACT I

SCENE.—*The drawing-room of the FENWICK house; large and comfortably furnished. Three doors; at R. leading to corridor, at L. leading to den or smoking room, at C. leading to stairs going up to the second floor. It would be best to have portières at C. if possible instead of a door, thus giving a glimpse of a hallway. A small couch at R., down stage, a table at entrance R., and a 'phone stand at L. of C. Chairs, not too many, and a small desk at L. down stage, with mirror on it.*

(As the curtain rises, MRS. FENWICK, a pleasant, middle-aged woman, dressed in a morning house dress, is seated at the desk opening a rather large mail. ROBERT, a good-looking young chap of about twenty-four or five, enters at C. He fidgets about for a few moments before interrupting her, then crosses R.)

ROBERT. Say, Mother —

MRS. F. Well, dear?

ROBERT *(looking cautiously around)*. Where's Dad?

MRS. F. Finishing his breakfast. You're very late.

ROBERT. I know. Overslept.

MRS. F. You do that rather often. Your father doesn't like it.

ROBERT. I don't see why people are so darned cranky about when other people eat their meals. I'm sure I don't care when he eats his ham and eggs.

MRS. F. *(severely)*. Well, I care! When there's only

one servant and she has to cook for a family of three and a chauffeur, it makes a great deal of difference when they eat their ham and eggs. I don't wish Selma to leave.

ROBERT. Shucks! What if she does? She can't cook, anyhow.

MRS. F. Perhaps not; but she can wash dishes and scrub the kitchen floor, which is quite as important.

(*Pause.*)

ROBERT. Say, Mother, did you sound Dad about the job?

MRS. F. Yes, but I'm afraid he doesn't want to give it to you.

ROBERT. Why not?

MRS. F. He doesn't think you've had enough experience to handle it.

ROBERT (*bitterly*). Where does he think a fellow's going to get experience? In kindergarten?

MRS. F. He says you lack initiative.

ROBERT. Initiative!

MRS. F. I know, dear; I think, myself, he's a little hard on you. He thinks so much of his business and he expects so much of any young man who goes into it.

ROBERT. I think it wouldn't hurt him to think a little of his only son. Business! What's business compared to your family?

MRS. F. Well, successful men like your father seem to think it's a good deal. You shouldn't have stirred him up right now about it. Here he's off for New York day after to-morrow, and sailing for London in a few days.

ROBERT. That's why I did it. I thought it would be so nice to get my start when he wasn't there to keep an eye on me.

MRS. F. (*shaking some bills out of a letter*). And it really seems to me as if I had all I could handle with this Pageant that you and Dorothy Stevens wished on me.

ROBERT (*sympathetically*). Poor Mother! How are the tickets selling?

MRS. F. Pretty well. Aren't some people reckless with their money? Here's a woman who sends me twenty dollars by mail!

ROBERT. It's certainly dandy of you to help us out.

MRS. F. Oh, I don't mind, dear, only it's a little trying to be treasurer, property woman, publicity person, and then to have to pose as the Goddess of Liberty!

ROBERT. You're a darling, Mother. I wish you'd picked a father for me with as nice a disposition as you've got.

MRS. F. Don't be disrespectful.

(Enter MR. FENWICK at c., *newspaper in hand; a large, rather pompous man, very much irritated just now by a late and hurried breakfast.*)

FENWICK. If I could get my breakfast on time I might stand some show of getting to my office before my stenographer goes out to lunch! As it is —

MRS. F. (*hurriedly to ROBERT*). Go and see if Romeo's outside with the car.

FENWICK (*tossing aside his paper*). You needn't. Romeo's the only person in this household who has any idea of time. If I could inculcate my son with the principles of punctuality and obedience that I find in my chauffeur, I would be quite satisfied.

ROBERT (*sulkily—from the couch*). No, you wouldn't. If I was punctual and obedient, you'd be howling for me to have initiative. I can't have everything.

MRS. F. Bob, dear!

FENWICK (*calming a little*). I didn't ask you to have initiative. I asked you to go into my office as a clerk and work your way up. You insisted upon being made a salesman. I said you lacked initiative.

ROBERT. How can you tell till you've tried me?

PROMOTING ROMEO

FENWICK (*importantly*). It's my business to be a judge of men. You have been perfectly satisfied to drift along —

MRS. F. Now, Father, that's not fair!

ROBERT. I'm thinking of your side of it. It seems to me an awful waste of money to send a son through Harvard and then stick him down in a ten-dollar-a-week job addressing envelopes. Of course it's your money.

FENWICK. Have you ever thought seriously about a business career?

ROBERT. Yes, I have. I've always wanted to be a promoter, but as long as you've got a business started I thought I might as well go on with it.

FENWICK. A promoter! Great Jehoshaphat!

MRS. F. John!

FENWICK (*turning on her severely*). The only reason he wants that position, and you know it, is because he's taken it into his head that he wants to marry that widow.

ROBERT (*rising*). Well, have you any fault to find with Mrs. Stevens?

FENWICK. None whatever, if you can afford to marry her. A young widow, with money, doesn't take a husband for the privilege of supporting him. She probably expects him to pay at least half the household expenses.

ROBERT. Sure she does. Fifty-fifty. I could if you'd give me that job.

(Enter SELMA at r. SELMA is a stolid looking Swede who gives one the impression that she has weighed the family and found it distinctly wanting.)

SELMA. Miss Evans.

(Exit at c.)

MRS. F. Now, what do you suppose Elsie Evans wants at this hour?

FENWICK. Money. I'm going to get out. As for

you, young man, I'll be fair with you. Show me one scrap of business sense, of initiative—promote something, anything, show me results of any kind, and I'll consider your proposition. Until then— (He stops as ELSIE EVANS enters at R. ELSIE is very pretty, very dainty, and extremely gushing. She is about twenty-two or three and has been badly spoiled by everybody. She takes herself so seriously that she is really quite amusing to outsiders, though her relatives find her rather trying. She is beautifully dressed in the latest thing in sports wear—might carry her golf bag. She looks a little taken back at her uncle's tone. He continues.) Good-morning, Elsie, did you want to see me?

ELsie. Why, yes, I did—but it'll wait, Uncle John, it'll wait nicely until you have more time.

FENWICK. That's good. I'm an hour late, now.

(Exit at R.)

ELsie (coming down). He's cross this morning, isn't he?

ROBERT. Rotten. Been picking on me.

Mrs. F. Robert! Sit down, dear.

ELsie (sits on couch). I mustn't stay, I've such a lot to do. When does Uncle leave?

Mrs. F. Day after to-morrow—at noon. Was it something about your allowance? If you've overdrawn, I can help you out.

ROBERT. Gosh, she never says that to me!

ELsie. Oh, no, it's not my allowance. I've been quite economical this month. Of course, Uncle John advanced me quite a lot extra for my trousseau. Isn't it fortunate for me that Papa left Uncle John full powers over my money? He always makes things come out even.

Mrs. F. Well, if there's nothing special, I'll leave you, children. I'm expecting my manicure in a few minutes and I'm afraid Selma's got my room rather torn up.

PROMOTING ROMEO

(Rises, leaves the desk open and the bills exposed.)

ELsie. Oh, certainly, darling! Do you still have that good-looking colored girl?

Mrs. F. Rosalie? Yes, she's so handy. She's quite turned poor Romeo's head, I'm afraid.

ELsie. Afraid?

Mrs. F. (at c.). Yes. She's rather light-headed and Romeo is a good, steady, hard-working fellow.

ELsie. Aunt Ellen, you are so adorable to take such a personal interest in the people who work for you!

Mrs. F. Why not? I assure you I expect them to take a personal interest in me.

(Exit at c.)

ROBERT (calling after her). I say, Mother, don't forget that Dorothy is coming over to-day to look at the rooms!

Mrs. F. (appearing in doorway). To look at the rooms?

ROBERT. Yes. Size 'em up and see if they'll do to rehearse the Pageant in to-morrow night. Dress rehearsal, you know.

Mrs. F. (tragically). That's all I needed to make my day complete!

(Exit at c.)

ROBERT (coming down to ELSIE; sits beside her). Mother's an awfully good sport.

ELsie. Isn't she? I wish Uncle John was.

ROBERT. Why? What have you been up to?

ELsie (with dignity). I haven't been up to anything, but I've taken a step that's going to make Uncle John froth at the mouth.

ROBERT. Humph!

ELsie. I've broken my engagement to Ben.

ROBERT. What!

ELsie. Yesterday—at the Country Club.

ROBERT. But you can't. Why, the wedding's set for

next Tuesday. The cards are out and you've got all the presents!

ELSIE. I know. It will be awkward.

ROBERT. Awkward? It'll be impossible. People don't do those things.

ELSIE. Uncle John will be furious. His heart is set on my marrying Ben.

ROBERT (*brutally*). I don't think Dad cares such a lot about your marrying Ben. It's the idea of your marrying *somebody*. So that he can turn over his guardianship to somebody else; somebody who can't kick.

ELSIE (*plaintively*). I don't think you're very nice, Bob.

ROBERT (*frankly*). I know I'm not, but I'm telling the truth. You've been an awful responsibility to Dad, Elsie. Hang it, I can see his good points even if he is my father!

ELSIE (*aggrieved*). I don't know what you mean by that. I've always tried to do my duty by everybody, but I seem to be so unlucky. Everybody's always against me.

ROBERT. Well, I didn't mean to be nasty.

ELSIE (*brightening*). And I mustn't talk that way, either. Since I've been studying psychoanalysis, I've learned that —

ROBERT. Hang psychoanalysis! What's Ben done?

ELSIE. Not a thing in the world.

ROBERT. Then why the deuce —

ELSIE. We're not suited to each other. Since I've been studying psychoanalysis I've learned so many things! It's lucky I've found it out. Uncle would have hated a divorce worse than a broken engagement, don't you think?

ROBERT. Now look here, Elsie —

ELSIE (*firmly*). I don't want to discuss it. You couldn't understand. Ben does and he's been dear about it. He agrees with me that two people unsuited for each other had better play with dynamite than get married.

ROBERT. Humph!

ELSIE. We're going on with our parts in the Pageant just the same, so you needn't worry about that, but I wanted to ask Uncle John what to do about the wedding presents.

ROBERT. Well, you'd better not ask him to-day. In the frame of mind he's in he'd probably tell you to send them back.

ELSIE. Well, I didn't think it was a very wise time to speak so I just kept still.

ROBERT. I wish I had your sense. That's the time I always speak.

ELSIE (*dreamily*). It's queer, but so many things about Ben that irritated me, and I didn't know why, are quite clear to me since I've been studying —

ROBERT. See here, Elsie, maybe there are things about you that irritated Ben, but he didn't think he had to break the engagement a week before the wedding. I think you're making a fool of yourself.

ELSIE. I'm only doing it after due reflection —

ROBERT. That's the way most people do it. What did your mother say?

ELSIE. Oh, Mother's so old-fashioned—so antediluvian! She's gone to bed with a nervous chill.

ROBERT. Well, she's not the only member of the family that's going to have a nervous chill. You just wait till the newspapers get hold of it.

ELSIE (*touching up her nose with a tiny puff*). I'm not afraid of the newspapers.

(Enter SELMA at R.)

SELMA. De finger-nail girl bane here.

ROBERT (*rising*). All right. Send her in and I'll tell Mother.

(Exit SELMA.)

ELSIE (*rising*). I'll be going. I'll see Uncle to-night.

ROBERT. Have you got your costume ready for to-morrow night? It's a dress rehearsal.

ELSIE. Oh, mine's very simple; just a cloak, you

know. I'm to be "Monna Vanna" and all she wears is a cloak. That's another thing Mother's wild about.

ROBERT (*alarmed*). Hang it all, Elsie, you've got to have something on underneath the coat!

ELsie. Monna Vanna didn't. That's the whole plot of the play.

ROBERT (*severely*). Never you mind what the plot says, you put on a bathing suit or something! Suppose the coat slips?

ELsie. I don't think I could feel like Monna Vanna in a bathing suit. I'm so temperamental that I have to feel my parts. (*Enter ROSALIE at R.*) Good-morning, Rosalie.

ROSALIE. Mornin', Miss Elsie.

ELsie. Bye-bye, Bob.

ROBERT (*stiffly*). Good-bye. (*Exit ELsie at R.* ROSALIE is a good-looking mulatto girl, very well dressed and rather self-sufficient.) I'll tell Mother you're here.

ROSALIE. Yessir.

(*Exit ROBERT at c. ROSALIE moves about leisurely, taking off her hat and jacket and putting on a jaunty little apron which she takes from her bag. She goes to the desk to look at herself in the little mirror, and her eyes fall on the bills which MRS. FENWICK left there. She picks them up and handles them lovingly. MRS. FENWICK'S voice is heard calling from up-stairs.*)

VOICE. Rosalie!

ROSALIE (*dropping the bills on the floor*). Yas'm?

VOICE. I'm coming down. Get the table ready there.

ROSALIE. Yas'm.

(*She stoops and picks up the money, is about to replace it on the desk, hesitates, eyes it covetously and with a sudden motion tucks it down the back of a chair, and throws her hat and coat on the chair. She goes to the 'phone table, brings it*

down stage, puts 'phone on floor and arranges her manicure articles on it. She also goes off at c. and returns with bowl of water. MRS. FENWICK enters.)

MRS. F. Well, Rosalie, how are you this morning?

ROSALIE. Fine and dandy, Mis' Fenwick. (She watches MRS. FENWICK who starts toward the desk, then apparently changes her mind and sits at the little table. ROSALIE sits opposite her and begins the manicuring process.) Ain' 'at a new white cook you got?

MRS. F. Selma? Yes, she's been with us about a month, I believe.

ROSALIE. She give me such er funny turn when I seen her.

MRS. F. Yes? Why?

ROSALIE (glibly). Yassam. She look jus' lak a woman Mis' Cooper had workin' fo' her 'bout a year ago; dat time she lose them pearls.

MRS. F. (carelessly). Yes?

ROSALIE. Yassam. Dat woman she was Swede, too. I can't jes' ricollec' her name. Don't seem lak it was Selma, but she do favor her a lot.

MRS. F. (yawning). Possibly.

ROSALIE. Mis' Cooper nevah did git her pearls back, did she?

MRS. F: I think not. (ROBERT slouches in and stands irresolutely in the doorway as though he hardly knew what to do with himself. There is a sound of an auto horn outside.) Robert, see if that is Romeo back with the car. I want him to take me down to the bank before luncheon.

(Exit ROBERT at r.)

ROSALIE. Guess you all likes Romeo pretty well, don't you, Mis' Fenwick?

MRS. F. Yes, he's a good chauffeur.

ROSALIE. Seems funny dat such a mean ole woman as Mis' Amarilla Badger got a good boy lak Romeo fo' a son.

(Enter ROBERT.)

ROBERT. It wasn't Romeo.

(He sits down with the newspaper and reads.)

MRS. F. What's the matter with Romeo's mother, Rosalie?

ROSALIE (with energy). She's jus' mean. Jus' nach-erly mean. She got lots of money, dat ole woman has; she's one of de riches' colored folks in dis state.

MRS. F. How did she get it?

ROSALIE. Keepin' a grocery sto' in 'at little town whah she lives at. You kin git awful rich in some of them little towns, Mis' Fenwick.

MRS. F. So I've heard.

ROSALIE. An' she won't give Romeo one cent to git mah'ied an' have a business fo' himse'f.

MRS. F. (amused). Does Romeo want to get married?

ROSALIE. Well, 'at's what *he* says. Romeo's been pesterin' me to git mah'ied wif him fo' a month.

MRS. F. Don't you like him?

ROSALIE. My lan' yes, cose I do, Mis' Fenwick, but I ain' goin' ma'y nobody's house boy. I don' have to.

MRS. F. Romeo's a chauffeur, not a house boy.

ROSALIE. Don' he wash yo' winders an' cut yo' grass?

MRS. F. Yes, occasionally.

ROSALIE (triumphantly). Well, 'at's all right if he wants to, but I got a independent business of my own and I'm goin' make money. I don' ma'y wif no servants. I don' have to.

MRS. F. What business do you want him to go into?

ROSALIE (promptly). Wan' him to buy a delicatessum sto', Mis' Fenwick. I know one he kin git fo' five hundred dollars. Over whah I lives. All de colored folks trades there an' de man wants to sell it cheap.

ROBERT (looking up). If it's such a good thing why does he want to sell it cheap?

ROSALIE (*quickly*). 'Cause he's leavin' town, Mister Robert. If Mis' Badger would lend Romeo dat money, he could run de delicatessum sto' in front an' me a colored beauty shop in de back.

MRS. F. It sounds very exciting. What does Romeo say?

ROSALIE (*scornfully*). He jus' that afraid of his Ma that he won' ask her! I tole him he needn' come honeyin' aroun' me till he quits washin' **white** folks' winders, no ma'am!

(Enter SELMA.)

SELMA. Mrs. Stevens.

(Exit at R.)

MRS. F. Goodness, Robert, take her into the other room! We'll be through here in a minute.

ROBERT (*going out at R.*). Oh, Dorothy won't mind. She has manicures, herself.

ROSALIE. I'm mos' thoo, Mis' Fenwick, if you don't want no facial.

MRS. F. (*hesitating*). I need it badly enough, but Selma's taken my room to pieces —

ROSALIE (*picking up her tools*). I could give it to you in your bathroom if your room is tore up.

MRS. F. (*rising*). All right. Go up-stairs and I'll be with you in half a minute.

ROSALIE. Yassam.

(MRS. FENWICK exits at R. ROSALIE looks about her, picks up her coat and hat and the money and goes out at C. SELMA enters R. and takes the table back to its place and exits at C., carrying bowl of water. MRS. FENWICK enters with ROBERT and DOROTHY as SELMA goes out. DOROTHY is a sweet-looking young woman, a year or two older perhaps than ROBERT, with rather a motherly air.)

MRS. F. If you don't mind, I'll run up-stairs and be beautified and you children can plan your rehearsal.

DOROTHY. It's awfully good of you, Mrs. Fenwick, to take such an interest in our Pageant.

MRS. F. (*taking her hands and looking into her eyes*). My dear, I've been taking an interest in things for Robert's sake for nearly thirty years. I'm afraid I've got the habit.

(*Exit at c.*)

DOROTHY (*with a little sigh*). I love your mother, Robert. (*Then, as though shaking off a mood*.) Well, let's get busy. This room will do nicely for the stage.

ROBERT. That's what I thought. We can use that door to enter—they can come down the stairs.

DOROTHY. Lovely! That couch, with a fur rug thrown over it will do for the *Monna Vanna* tableau.

ROBERT. Look here, Dorothy, Elsie swears she's going to play it in a coat.

DOROTHY. Well, that's the regulation stunt for *Monna Vanna*, isn't it?

ROBERT. But she's going to play it in a *coat*—and *nothing else!*

DOROTHY (*laughing*). Oh, no, she isn't. I'm bossing this show.

ROBERT. You don't know what an obstinate little devil Elsie is. She's broken her engagement to Ben.

DOROTHY. Bob!

ROBERT. Fact. She told me so in this room half an hour ago.

DOROTHY. She can't. Ben won't let her.

ROBERT. Ben's a worm—a meek, crawling, spineless worm! If he hadn't been, he'd have broken it himself a year ago.

DOROTHY. They've been engaged long enough, goodness knows, to know their own minds.

ROBERT. Mind? She hasn't any. She has temperament.

DOROTHY. It's an atrocious thing to do.

ROBERT (*gloomily*). It's going to make Dad harder than ever to live with.

DOROTHY. Has he been very trying lately?

ROBERT. Rotten.

DOROTHY. The job? (*He nods.*) I'm sorry. I wanted you to have it.

ROBERT. Did you—honest? You mean you cared whether I got it or not?

DOROTHY. Why, of course.

ROBERT. You know why I wanted it, Dorothy?

DOROTHY. Why, because you wanted to get on in the world, naturally.

ROBERT. I wanted it because I wanted to be able to ask you to marry me without feeling like a fool.

(*She is sitting on the couch and he stands beside her.*)

DOROTHY. Why should asking me to marry you make you feel like a fool, Bobby?

ROBERT (*frankly*). Because I'm broke, that's why—and you've got money. I shan't ask you until I have something to offer you.

DOROTHY. No matter how I feel about it, I suppose?

ROBERT. You haven't anything to do with this—it's my funeral.

DOROTHY. I suppose I may make a suggestion? As long as you admit a certain interest in me?

ROBERT. I don't mind a suggestion.

DOROTHY. Why don't you try to show him that you can handle the job?

ROBERT. You're as bad as he is. He wants me to show some initiative—to promote something. So he can tell whether I'm human or just the family fool.

DOROTHY. Why don't you?

ROBERT. Well, what?

DOROTHY. Oh—anything that takes a clever person to set it right. Make Elsie behave—

ROBERT (*bitterly*). That doesn't need a clever person—it needs a genius.

DOROTHY (*thoughtfully*). I think we all make our

mistakes trying to do big things. Some little near at hand thing that seems quite hopeless demands just as much initiative and brains as some bigger thing.

ROBERT (*fascinated*). It sounds all right when you say it, Dorothy, but I doubt if Dad —

DOROTHY. Oh, he will. I believe that in the bottom of his heart he really wants you to have that job.

ROBERT. Well, he certainly doesn't wear his heart on his sleeve. Say, Dorothy, if he does give it to me, will you —

DOROTHY. Will I —

ROBERT. Give me the other job I want?

DOROTHY. I'll consider it favorably, Bobby.

ROBERT (*starting toward her*). You're a darling!

DOROTHY (*rising*). I must run on. I've a luncheon engagement. It's understood that we have a full rehearsal here to-morrow night?

ROBERT. Yes. And you'll see about Elsie?

DOROTHY. I will.

(*She runs off. He follows her. Enter ROMEO at L. He is a good-looking colored boy in chauffeur's livery. He looks around rather sheepishly, goes to c. and listens, evidently to see if ROSALIE is about. ROBERT enters and sees him.*)

ROBERT (*dreamily*). Some little near at hand thing that seems quite hopeless! (*Sees ROMEO; an idea dawns.*) Gosh! Say, Romeo, don't go away. Mother wants you to drive her down to the bank.

ROMEO. Yassir.

ROBERT. She's up-stairs having her face washed by —what's her name? That girl of yours?

ROMEO (*grinning*). Guess you mus' mean Rosalie.

ROBERT. I do.

(*He sits and takes up paper to read but keeps his eye on ROMEO, who lingers.*)

ROMEO. She ain' no gal of mine, Mister Bob. She

won' have no mo' to do wif me cause I washes de winders.

ROBERT. Humph!

ROMEO (*gloomily*). Seems lak a woman always wantin' a man to be doin' somethin' diff'rent.

ROBERT. Ain't it the truth?

ROMEO. Somethin' ha'd.

ROBERT. Never satisfied with you as you are, eh?

ROMEO. Tha's so. Always a-pushin' an' a-urgin' a man into somethin' he's better off outside of.

ROBERT. Yep, that's what.

ROMEO. Rosalie, she say: "Go git yo' Ma give yo' fi' hund'ed dollahs to buy 'at delicatessum sto' an' I marries you." She don' know my Ma. Nos-suh!

ROBERT. Humph!

ROMEO. Anybody who kin git my Ma to put fi' hund'ed dollahs into a sto' ain' goin' be a chauffeur, he gwine be a p'omoto', dat's whut.

ROBERT. Well, why not?

ROMEO. Huh?

ROBERT. Why not be a promoter?

ROMEO (*in alarm*). Who? Me?

ROBERT (*rising*). Sure. It isn't just the big things that show what we're made of, Romeo, it's some little near at hand thing —

ROMEO. Gittin' money outen Mis' Amarilla Badger ain' no little near at hand thing, Mister Bob. Nossuh!

ROBERT. Don't be so pessimistic, Romeo, or you'll never get on in the world. Psychoanalysis teaches us that the world is ours for the asking.

ROMEO. Dat man didn' know Mis' Amarilla Badger, Mister Bob. Askin' ain' gwine have no effec' on her.

ROBERT. What's the matter with her?

ROMEO. Nothin' ain't de mattah wif her. She's a fine ole lady. But she ain't lettin' none of her money git away fum her widout a struggle—and she powerful strong.

ROBERT. But her only son —

ROMEO. On'y son gotter work fo' livin' same's anybody else. Didn' I ask her fo' money to go to dat music school —

ROBERT. That's different. This is a business opportunity.

ROMEO. An' if she ever hear 'bout me wantin' to marry a yaller gal she'd pison me. She hates 'em.

ROBERT. It would be a loan, you know. You could repay her.

ROMEO. Yassir, I could, if de business pay, but mebbe it don't.

ROBERT. That's no way to go into a thing. "Maybe it won't."

ROMEO. Well, I ain' goin' into it. Only thing my Ma'd ever give me money for would be if I was sick or daid an' I ain' gwine be either.

ROBERT. Have you asked her?

ROMEO. No, sah, an' I ain' goin' to.

ROBERT. Where does she live?

ROMEO. Down in little town called "Pitfield." 'Bout eighty mile from here.

ROBERT. Well, it's too bad you can't have a light case of appendicitis and wire her that you need the money for the operation. Everybody borrows money to go into business, you know. Think it over.

ROMEO. Yassir, dat's so, sir. (ROSALIE's voice is heard singing as she comes down-stairs. ROBERT exits R. ROMEO lingers, fascinated. She enters, her hat and coat on, ready to go.) Mawnin', Rosalie.

ROSALIE. Mawnin', Romeo, how's yo'se'f? Ain' it a gran' day?

ROMEO. Ain' so gran' 'cordin' to my way of thinkin'.

ROSALIE. You's awful pessimistic, seems to me. Specially fo' a young man dat's engaged to a nice gal like me.

(She comes closer to him.)

ROMEO. Who says you an' me's engage?

ROSALIE. I do. Jes' as soon as you gits 'at money from yo' Ma, Romeo, we's goin' be mah'ied, an' live in 'at nice little delicatessum sto'.

ROMEO. Humph! Why dat man wan' sell, Rosalie, if he's makin' so much money?

ROSALIE. 'Cause he's gotter sell. He's goin' away.

ROMEO. Why?

ROSALIE. I ain' ask him, honey, but it looks to me lak he been caught, mebbe, doin' somethin' he didn't ought to and had to git out.

ROMEO. If he's makin' money I don' reckon he'd have to git out. It don' seem likely.

ROSALIE. Come now, honey, does you want to ma'y me or doesn't you? 'Cause if you doesn't they's plenty whut does, an' they don' have to git money from they mas to do it, neither.

ROMEO (*putting his arm around her*). Cose I does. Ain' I tell you you's the pretties' gal in this town —black or white?

ROSALIE. Tellin' me them things don't make no hit with me, Romeo, cose I knows them myse'f. You tell me you done ast your Ma for that money and ain' goin' be a no'-count house boy no more, an' mebbe I'll pay some attention.

ROMEO (*meditatively*). Askin' ain't goin' git me nothin'. Mister Bob says 'at I might git appendicitis an' mebbe she sen' it to me, but I don't keer for dat. White doctors is too handy wif de knife.

ROSALIE (*clapping her hands excitedly*). Lawd, ain' dat white boy got brains? Cose you gotter have appendicitis, honey, or mebbe —

ROMEO. Nossuh. Not me.

ROSALIE. You kin have gall stones. Dey cuts for dem, don' dey?

ROMEO. Nossuh, I ain' goin' have nuthin' they cuts fo'. I'd ruther live single.

ROSALIE. Ain' you the doggondest fool, Romeo! You ain' really goin' have 'em.

ROMEO. Huh? Den why can't I have de chicken pox?

ROSALIE. We're goin' make yo' Ma *think* you've got-
tem. Gimme a pencil.

(*She takes an envelope from her bag.*)

ROMEO (*digging out a pencil*). What fur?

ROSALIE. Telegram. (*Writes.*)

ROMEO (*scared*). Now, look-a-here, honey, I
don' —

ROSALIE (*kissing him*). You jes' leave it to Rosalie.
Ain' dat boy got brains!

ROMEO. He's got de kin' of brains 'at lands folks in
de pen, I'm tellin' you.

ROSALIE (*reads*). "Am under ether but will live.
Send \$500 at once. Romeo."

ROMEO (*scandalized*). My lan', I ain' goin' sen' no
sich talk as 'at to dat ole lady. She gwine bust
me sho'.

ROSALIE (*severely*). I'm goin' send dat on my way
home. If you wants to come along and see me
do it, you kin. (*She flounces out at R.*)

ROMEO (*helplessly*). But —

(*He hurries after her. SELMA enters, duster in hand,
and sees them go. She shakes her head pessimistically.*)

SELMA. Aye don't lak dis place. Dey bane home too
mooch. Aye lak place vere peoples goes out.
Where girl gets some time to herself. (*She picks
up the newspaper and finds the "ads."*) I dank
I look for annoder place!

(*Enter MRS. FENWICK, dressed for the street.*)

MRS. F. Selma, tell Romeo I want the car.

SELMA. He bane gone out after the finger-nail girl.

MRS. F. Humph! Then find Mister Robert and tell
him he must drive me down-town. (*She goes to
desk to close it. SELMA goes out at C. MRS.
FENWICK misses the money.*) Gone! That's a
nice state of affairs! A thief in the house! Who
can it be!

CURTAIN

ACT II

(*Same scene. The following evening. DOROTHY and ROBERT are arranging the stage for the rehearsal; at least DOROTHY is—ROBERT is busily engaged in looking at himself in the mirror. He is costumed as "Hamlet." DOROTHY, being the coach, is not in costume.*)

DOROTHY. Bob, if you would stop looking at yourself in the glass, and give me your attention, I might get something ready before the rest of the cast are dressed.

ROBERT (*hastily*). Of course.

DOROTHY. I think this couch—pulled out a bit—will do nicely for "Monna Vanna."

ROBERT (*pulling it out*). Have you seen —

DOROTHY. No, I haven't seen Elsie. I've been too busy. What did your father say about her breaking the engagement?

ROBERT. I don't think I ought to repeat it. He hasn't spoken to her since. He's going to cut down her allowance and I guess it'll take some psycho-analysis to get over that.

DOROTHY. She deserves it. Such a nasty way to treat Ben.

ROBERT. Then we've had a lot of other troubles since yesterday. Somebody swiped twenty dollars out of Mother's desk. Money some idiot sent through the mail for tickets.

DOROTHY. Oh, Bob, how horrid!

ROBERT. It happened during the morning, and Selma left unexpectedly in the afternoon, so it looks as if she was the guilty party.

DOROTHY. Oh, do you think so? She seemed so nice. I don't want to think her a thief.

ROBERT. Well, I felt that way yesterday, too, but since I had to wash the dinner dishes last night and get breakfast this morning, I don't seem to mind thinking it so much.

DOROTHY. What will your father do?

ROBERT. Nothing. Pay the money and let it go. It's the easiest way out.

DOROTHY. But if she's a thief, you're turning her loose to steal somebody else's money.

ROBERT. I know. Rosalie told Mother something yesterday about Selma's looking like the Swedish girl that Mrs. Cooper had when her pearls were stolen. But you can't hound a poor Swede for twenty dollars.

DOROTHY. No, but you could call Mrs. Cooper up and ask her —

ROBERT. She's in California.

(Enter ELSIE at r. ELSIE is dressed in a long black cloak, or cape, which completely hides her figure. Her neck and arms are bare, and she wears flesh-colored stockings and black slippers. As far as the casual observer can see, she is quite correctly garbed for the part of "Monna Vanna.")

ELsie. Well, what is the matter? I rang and rang and then found the door unlocked. Hasn't Selma turned up yet?

ROBERT. No, and I guess I'll tack a card on the door —Walk In! I can't be answering the bell all the time.

(Exit at r.)

ELsie. How nice he looks! He makes a real sweet Hamlet, doesn't he? Anybody here?

DOROTHY. Yes, several. They're up-stairs dressing. If you'll lend Bob a hand with the stage, I'll run up and help Mrs. Fenwick with her costume.

ELsie. Yes, indeed. Ben brought me and then went

back for his sister. That child never is ready to go anywhere. I pity her husband if she gets one.

(*She goes to the mirror and peeps at herself. DOROTHY refers to a list which she has in her hand.*)

DOROTHY. Let me see—you are Monna Vanna, Ben is Prinzivalle, May is Pocahontas, Robert is Hamlet, Mrs. Fenwick is the Goddess of Liberty —

ELsie. Seems a little scattered, historically, doesn't it?

DOROTHY (*nettled*). No, it doesn't. Tableaux aren't supposed to be connected. What have you got on under that cloak?

ELsie (*innocently*). Me? Why —

(Enter ROBERT.)

ROBERT. Now, let 'em come. Say, Dorothy, aren't you going up to help Mother?

DOROTHY. Right now.

(*Runs off c.*)

ELsie. Isn't she cranky about her old tableaux?

(*She drapes herself picturesquely on the couch.*)
Is Uncle John still furious?

ROBERT. Is he! Well, you'd better keep out of his way if you value your—allowance!

ELsie (*alarmed*). Bob!

ROBERT (*maliciously*). He takes off ten dollars whenever your name is mentioned. He's dining at the club to-night.

ELsie. I wish they'd poison him! He's the most hard-hearted man in this town—no breadth of ideas, no sympathy, no — Bob, is my nose too white, do you think?

ROBERT. I don't know anything about noses. I want to know, in the interests of the audience, what you've got —

(*Enter ROMEO, c., waving a telegram frantically.*)

ROMEO. Mister Bob, Mister Bob, look-a-hyah at
whut's happen'!

ELSIE (*rising*). Good gracious!

ROBERT. What's the matter with you? Don't you
know where you are?

ROMEO. Yassir, I know all right an' I ain' goin' be
dere long. She's comin'.

ROBERT. Who's coming? What are you talking
about, anyhow?

ROMEO (*wildly*). Talkin' 'bout? Whut I'm talkin'
'bout! I'm talkin' 'bout Mis' Amarilla Badger.
Tha's who I'm talkin' 'bout.

ELSIE. He's mad! Don't let him come near me!

(*She retreats back of the couch.*)

ROMEO (*desperately*). Mad? No, ma'am, I ain' mad
—I'm plumb scared thoo to ma gizzard. Hyah
I done sen' dat telegram lak Mister Bob tole
me —

ROBERT. What? *I* told you? Nothing of the kind.
I suggested —

ROMEO. Wal, lak whut you suggested me to; me an'
Rosalie done sen' it —

ROBERT. Look here, Romeo, let's get this straight.
This is serious.

ROMEO. Hit's mighty serious fer me, suh.

ELSIE. Oh, Bob, what have you been doing?

ROBERT. Nothing! Romeo and his girl have been
throwing fits because they couldn't get mar-
ried —

ROMEO. No, sah, dat ain' it. I could git ma'ied all
right. It was Rosalie what couldn't.

ELSIE. But —

ROBERT. She wouldn't marry him unless he had
money enough to go into business for himself
and —

ELSIE. What a mercenary little wretch she must be!

ROMEO. No, ma'am, she ain' mercerinary, she
jes' —

ROBERT. Keep still! I suggested that it was a pity he couldn't have a nice case of appendicitis and send to his mother for the money.

ELsie. Robert, how wicked of you!

ROBERT. Well, he's her only child and she's got scads of money. Why shouldn't she help him out? Of course I didn't suppose the idiot would go and do it without consulting me about it.

ROMEO. Rosalie, she done the consultin'. She say sen' 'at wire now.

ELsie (*to Robert*). But what business was it of yours, Bob Fenwick? The idea of dashing into other people's love affairs like that! The nerve!

ROBERT (*sheepishly*). Well, I had to do something. Dad said he'd give me a job if I'd show a little initiative.

ROMEO (*injured*). Ain' no reason why you got to pick out me to show it on.

ROBERT. And Dorothy suggested that I try to promote something. (*Bitterly.*) Some little near at hand thing that seemed hopeless!

ROMEO. Wal, I reckin you done po'moted me into de cooler! She say she's comin' here direc'.

ROBERT (*horrified*). Here? To this house?

ROMEO. Dat whut she say.

ROBERT. What did you two fools wire her?

ROMEO. Dat I was havin' a operation.

ROBERT. Well, she can't come here. We've got a houseful of people here and if Dad heard of it he'd murder me.

ELsie. He mustn't hear. If we can keep it from him till noon to-morrow —

ROMEO. Yassam. Dat's it. I do' want to git fired. Jobs is too ha'd to git nowadays.

ROBERT (*wildly*). Shut up, both of you, while I think!

ELsie. Yes, Romeo, come away and let him think.

ROMEO (*apprehensively*). Reckin he's goin' p'omote me into some mo' trouble.

ELsie (*soothingly*). No, he won't. Just be patient —

ROBERT. That's it. Hooray! Patient—that's the idea!

BOTH. Well?

ROBERT. You've got to be a patient when the old lady comes. You've got to have that operation.

ROMEO. What?

ROBERT (*slowly and patiently*). You must have that operation for appendicitis. That'll settle the whole thing. Her mother's heart will —

ROMEO. I ain' thinkin' 'bout no mother's heart. I'm thinkin' 'bout my 'pendix. I done had dat 'pendix twenty-fi' years. It's always treated me white an' I ain' goin' have it tore out of me to please nobody.

ELSIE. But, Romeo, it's a very simple operation. Really it is. Lots of society people go and have it done just because they want a little vacation.

ROMEO. No, ma'am. I do' want no vacation. I likes to work.

ROBERT. But it's such an easy way out of the whole thing. Mother comes—where's Romeo? At the County Hospital having a little operation. Everything going splendidly. Mother overjoyed. Comes across with the money without a groan.

ROMEO. Yassir. An' who gits de money?

ROBERT. Why, you. Hold on—I suppose the doctors have to get some of it.

ROMEO. Don't you fool yourself, Mister Bob. Doctor's goin' git all of it. Where I comes in? No money, no job, no 'pendix, no delicatessum sto', an' no gal. Reckon you'd better quit thinkin', Mister Bob, befo' you strains yo' haid muscles.

ELSIE. That's right, Bob, it wouldn't help us anyhow. Uncle John would find out and give us fits. Let me think.

ROMEO (*apprehensively*). I reckon it's time for me to go to de club for Mr. Fenwick. If she come —

ROBERT (*wildly*). She mustn't come!

ELSIE. Hold on—Romeo, you've got to disappear—that's the idea. Like the man in the opera.

ROMEO (*suspiciously*). Dis'pear? Whar to?

ELsie (*airily*). Anywhere that isn't here.

ROBERT. That's the idea! He can disappear —

ELsie. And then when Uncle's been gone a couple of days you can wander back and say you've had — what's the name of that thing, Bob, that makes people wander off sort of crazy like?

ROMEO (*gloomily*). Moonshine?

ELsie. No, stupid, it begins with "a."

ROBERT. Aphasia! That's the stuff. You were under the influence of that when you sent the telegram!

ROMEO. Dat soun's better than appendicitis. Dey don' cut for aspasia, does they?

ROBERT. Of course not, idiot. Now, if we can only keep Mrs. Amarilla Badger away from Dad —

ROMEO. Hol' on, Mister Bob! How's I goin' disappear widout no money?

ROBERT. Humph! How much you got?

ROMEO. Jes' fifty cents. I done buy me some new clothes yestiddy an' dey done clean me out good.

ROBERT. Humph! I've got two-fifty.

ROMEO. Wal, I cain' disappear for no week on th'ee dollars, nossuh!

ELsie. Couldn't you practice a little economy, Romeo?

ROMEO (*decidedly*). No, ma'am. I ain' no bum to go sleepin' in a flop. I'se a genelman an' ma tastes is genelman's tastes.

ELsie (*pulling a ring from her finger*). Look here, Romeo, you take this and pawn it. We'll get it back when the trouble is over.

ROBERT (*slightly shocked*). It's your engagement ring!

ELsie. What if it is? My engagement's broken — what's the good of a ring?

ROBERT. But you'll have to give it back to Ben. He may want it for another girl.

ELsie (*indignantly*). If Ben Craig is fickle enough to fall in love with another girl after all the time he's been engaged to me —

VOICE. Robert!

ELSIE. It's Aunt Ellen. Hurry off before she comes, Romeo, and don't you dare come back till Uncle's gone.

(*She pushes ROMEO out at R. just as MRS. FENWICK enters hurriedly at c. She is costumed as the Goddess of Liberty and has considerable difficulty walking in her draperies, which strongly resemble sheets.*)

MRS. F. Robert, your father has 'phoned for the car. Where is Romeo?

ROBERT. Gosh, how stunning you look, Mother!

MRS. F. (*irritably*). I do not. I look like an idiot escaped from a Turkish bath. Where is Romeo?

ROBERT. He—why, he's gone.

MRS. F. Gone where?

ELSIE. Why, he—he's disappeared!

MRS. F. Disappeared where? Your uncle is on the wire and he wants the car.

ELSIE. Why, you see, Aunt Ellen, Robert's been looking for him everywhere, but he's just sort of melted away. Bob says he's been acting very oddly lately.

MRS. F. I hadn't noticed it. Well, I'll have to tell John. He's very much irritated.

ELSIE. Irritated? Oh, my goodness!

MRS. F. (*at c.*). Dorothy wants someone to help her move the victrola in here. She's going to use it for the rehearsal.

ROBERT. I'll go in a minute.

MRS. F. (*lingering*). Robert, you don't think it was something about that money that made Romeo —

ROBERT. No, I don't.

MRS. F. Well, it's very strange —

(*Exit at c., bewildered.*)

ROBERT (*to ELSIE*). I'll be back in a minute.

ELSIE (*clutching him*). Suppose that awful woman comes?

ROBERT. Tell her anything to get rid of her till to-morrow.

ELSIE. It won't do to scare her. She'd go to the police. (*Voices at R.*) Oh, it's Ben and May!

ROBERT. Elsie, mind that Dorothy doesn't hear about this.

ELSIE. Why?

ROBERT (*savagely*). I'm not going to be made to look like a fool in the eyes of the woman I'm going to marry, that's why!

(*Exit at c. Enter BEN and MAY. BEN is evidently in costume but his overcoat and hat cover him up pretty well. MAY, who is seventeen and pert, wears an evening cloak and galoshes.*)

BEN (*staring after ROBERT in astonishment*). I say, what's the matter with Bob?

ELSIE. Oh, he's just excited over the rehearsal and the fact that their chauffeur has disappeared. May, you'd better go up and take your things off. (*Eyeing her closely.*) I thought you were supposed to be Pocahontas?

MAY. I changed my mind. I'm going to be Cleopatra. It's lots more fun.

ELSIE. That's just like a flapper. Always wants the vampy parts.

MAY. You run your part in this show, Elsie Evans, and I'll run mine. At least I don't break engagements a week before the wedding.

BEN. Come, children, cut it out. You're not related yet so you don't have to quarrel. What's the matter with the servants in this house anyhow?

MAY (*to ELSIE*). What in the world have you got on —

ELSIE (*angrily*). Now, look here, if one more person asks me what I've got on, I'm going to show them! So there!

MAY. Oh, very well!

(Exit at c.)

ELSIE. It's perfectly absurd for that infant to be playing Cleopatra! Cleopatra with bobbed hair!

BEN. As a matter of fact, Cleo did wear her hair bobbed, according to the Pyramids —

ELSIE (*tragically*). Ben, please don't argue with me. I'm so nervous to-night I hardly know what I'm doing. Uncle's been reducing my allowance by ten-dollar steps ever since I told him we'd broken our engagement.

BEN. We!

ELSIE. You agreed with me it was best.

BEN (*airily*). Well, you said you wanted to break it and I think a girl ought to have her own way about a little thing like that.

ELSIE (*taken back*). Little thing! Why, Ben.

BEN. Yes. You decided I wasn't the man to make you happy, so why marry me? That's reasonable. Only don't say I did it.

ELSIE. You—you didn't feel that way about it yesterday.

BEN (*jauntily*). I hadn't got used to my freedom. I'm getting used to it. I don't mind it at all. How d'you like my costume?

(*He takes off coat. Instead of the armor of Prinzi-
valle, he is costumed in a leather jerkin, green
tights, and a green hat with a feather which he
takes carefully from his coat pocket.*)

ELSIE (*horrified*). What in the world —

BEN. Nifty, don't you think?

ELSIE (*severely*). Nifty? It's awful. You don't look any more like Monna Vanna's lover than — than a wooden Indian.

BEN. Huh?

ELSIE. You wouldn't read the book so I told you distinctly that your costume was to be mediæval Italian.

BEN. This is mediæval. It's Robin Hood. I couldn't remember the other guy's name.

ELsie (*tearfully*). You're ruining my tableau—and I was going to make such a hit with it—how could you be so hateful—

BEN. Oh, I say —

ELsie. Robin Hood! Why didn't you dress up as George Washington while you were about it?

BEN. I say, Elsie, please don't—I'll stand behind the table or drape myself back of a curtain —

ELsie. You could kneel behind the couch. The less they see of you the better they'll like you.

BEN (*meekly*). All right.

(*He goes behind the couch.*)

ELsie. Now, try getting on your knees back of the couch and I'll sit on this side — (*She does.*) There, not much of you shows. Now, lean this way — (*He does and she jumps back.*) Oh, you've been smoking again and you promised you wouldn't!

BEN. Well, I didn't think you'd care now, so I took a whiff or two.

ELsie. I shall always take an interest in your health whether I marry you or not.

BEN (*drily*). Thank you, my dear. Oh, I say, where's your ring?

ELsie (*confused*). Why, why, I —

BEN. You had it on when you left home. I saw it.

ELsie. I—I must have laid it down here somewhere. Yes, I'm sure I did.

(*BEN gets up and looks about.*)

BEN. I don't see it.

ELsie. Why —

BEN. Has that Swede come back?

ELsie. No. Now, Ben —

BEN. And now the chauffeur's disappeared! When did you notice that ring last?

ELsie. Oh, about half an hour ago!

BEN. And when —

(Enter MRS. AMARILLA BADGER. *She is a very portly colored lady, dressed in vivid colors and in the very latest style, which, being designed for flappers, looks even more oddly on MRS. BADGER than on a white person her size and age.*)

ELSIE. Oh!

MRS. B. Am dis yere Mis' Fenwick house?

BEN (*aside*). Another tableau?

ELSIE. Hush! Why, it—oh, yes, of course, it is.

MRS. B. I rung de bell, an' den I seen dat cyard, so I jes' drop in. I'se Romeo's Ma.

ELSIE. I knew it. (*Desperately to BEN.*) Go get Bob—quick!

BEN (*bewildered*). But —

ELSIE (*with a vicious snap*). Get Bob!

(*Exit BEN quickly.*)

MRS. B. (*stunned at the revelation of BEN'S costume*). My Gawd! Is dis sho' Mis' Fenwick house?

ELSIE (*rapidly*). Oh, yes, this is her house, all right, but she's terribly busy with company and can't possibly see you. I suppose you came to see Romeo?

MRS. B. (*taking telegram from her bag*). Yassam, I got dis yere wiah fum Romeo yestiddy an' I come d'reckly an' circumstantially to know how come.

ELSIE (*taking telegram*). "Under ether but will live. Send \$500 at once."

MRS. B. (*firmly*). I don' sen' no five hund'ed dollahs to nobody thout I knows whut's it fo'. If dat boy under ether, how come he to sen' dat wiah to me?

How come —

ELSIE. Why, the fact is, Mrs. Badger, Romeo hasn't been himself lately. Sort of queer and wandering —

MRS. B. (*shaking her parasol angrily*). Humph! He been goin' after some yaller wench, dat's whut's de matter wif him! I'll wander him!

(She pounds on the floor with the parasol.)

ELSIE (aside). Oh, where is Bob! (To her.) Why, you see, Mrs. Badger, he wandered off this morning—nobody knows just where he is—I'm sure it's not a yellow girl—

(Enter ROBERT and BEN. The latter stands back of the couch. ROBERT darts forward and shakes hands effusively with MRS. BADGER to cover his embarrassment. She looks at his costume in horror.)

MRS. B. (aside). My Gawd!

ROBERT (rapidly). How do you do, Mrs. Badger, how do you do? Come up to see Romeo, have you? Isn't that splendid? You'll be proud of him when you see him, but he's not at home just now. You see my father's not very well; nervous, frightfully nervous and all that, and he has Romeo drive him around town for hours at a time. That's what he's doing now.

ELSIE (who has been trying wildly to get his attention). Fool!

BEN (to her in a loud whisper). I say, what's it all about?

MRS. B. Dis young lady say she don' know whah Romeo is—

ROBERT. Yes, yes, of course. She don't. Father takes such queer notions that you never know where he's driving. Now, if you'll go out to the garage—

ELSIE. Ahem!

ROBERT. Excuse me! (To ELSIE.) Well!

ELSIE (whispering). First place Uncle will look when he comes back!

ROBERT. I didn't mean the garage, it's rather lonely out there. I meant—Elsie, take her up to—

ELSIE. The girls are dressing up-stairs. The den—

ROBERT. Exactly. Ben, take Mrs. Badger into the den—

BEN (*to Elsie*). Aren't you going to tell her about the money and the ring?

ELSIE (*severely*). Take her into the den and don't talk to her. Can't you see the woman's worn out?

MRS. B. (*suspiciously*). I ain' goin' nowhars tell I hears —

ELSIE (*pushing Ben and Mrs. Badger out at L.*). Of course not; we'll let you know the minute he shows up.

ROBERT. Why did you tell her he'd wandered off? You said yourself she'd want to go to the police.

ELSIE. Oh, how do I know? Ben was nearly driving me crazy about my ring. He's got it into his head that Romeo stole it —

ROBERT (*horrified*). Stole it!

ELSIE. Yes. I couldn't tell him the truth. It takes hours to pound the truth into Ben, but he swallows fibs beautifully.

ROBERT. If Father sees that telegram —

VOICE. Bob, come and help me move this victrola!

ROBERT. In a minute, Dorothy! (*To Elsie*) We must get rid of her! We must get rid of her!

ELSIE. Oh, we must! We must!

VOICE. Bob!

ROBERT. Coming.

(*Exit c.*)

ELSIE. My head is swimming! If ever I try to help Bob Fenwick out of a scrape again! Oh, I wish it was the days of slavery—wouldn't I sell Mrs. Amarilla Badger down the river!

(*Enter Ben.*)

BEN. Say, that old person's kind of scared of us. She acts awfully queer. What's up, anyhow?

ELSIE. Oh, Ben, don't ask questions. If you knew how nervous I was!

BEN. But what's all this stuff about "ether" and —

ELSIE. Oh, if you must know, Robert and Romeo have been up to something that Uncle mustn't know, and if Uncle finds that woman here, he will know; and if he finds out that I've helped Robert, I'll be a pauper by the end of the week. Now, are you satisfied?

BEN (*doggedly*). Yes, but it looks to me as if you were letting this Romeo guy get away with the money and your ring. Now —

ELSIE (*wildly*). Oh, my soul! Ben Craig, if you're not enough to drive any woman raving, tearing mad! Now, before I go all to pieces, will you rehearse this tableau with me? You are back of the couch and I am sitting on it.

BEN (*taking his place*). Sure. But what's the big idea?

ELSIE. Never mind the idea. The less ideas you have, the better you'll act. Just look at me agreeably—don't grin! (BEN *sobers up*.) Well, that's better, though I wouldn't call it exactly—oh, well, it'll do. Now put one arm about me—they don't in the play, but —

BEN (*cheerfully complying*). Hang the play!

ELSIE. Don't grin! Now, hold it —

(Enter MR. FENWICK *excitedly*.)

FENWICK. This is a fine state of affairs! A fine state of affairs this is! Here I pay an exorbitant salary to a good-for-nothing chauffeur, and a ruinous allowance to an equally good-for-nothing son, and when I want my car in a hurry I'm told that one of them has wandered off and the other one is rehearsing and I have to walk home from my club after a heavy dinner! I—hullo—what are you two doing?

ELSIE (*faintly*). Just—just rehearsing, Uncle John. It's our night to rehearse, you know.

FENWICK. Are there more fools coming?

ELSIE. No, sir, most of them are here.

FENWICK. Humph! I believe you. I'll go into the

den and lock the door and perhaps I can smoke a cigar in peace.

(*Takes off his coat and goes up stage with it.*)

ELSIE (*desperately to BEN*). Get her out of the den, quick! Show her the way to the garage.

BEN. But —

ELSIE. I'll keep him here. Hurry!

(*Exit BEN. His idea is to get out while MR. FENWICK is up stage removing his coat, but with his usual awkwardness, he manages to trip on a rug and goes out with a crash.*)

FENWICK (*turning*). What's the matter with that idiot?

ELSIE. He—he isn't very well.

FENWICK. Humph! He looks well enough—it's his brains that seem to be affected.

ELSIE (*persuasively*). Uncle John, won't you sit down just a moment and let me ask you something?

FENWICK (*gruffly*). Well?

ELSIE. Would you mind telling me my financial status at just this moment?

FENWICK. Oh, that's all you have on your mind, is it? Money, as usual. Well, let me tell you, young lady, that your financial status is just exactly fifty dollars lower than it was yesterday morning. Is that all?

ELSIE (*stricken but game*). Oh! No—no—that wasn't it. But you'll have to sit down and be patient.

(*He sits. MRS. BADGER'S voice is heard at L. then dies away.*)

VOICE. Nossuh—I ain' goin' nowhars till —

FENWICK. What's that?

ELSIE. Nothing. Just somebody rehearsing in the hall.

FENWICK. In the hall? Jumping snakes!! Haven't we any privacy?

ELSIE. But I want to tell you something that will please you, Uncle dear. Ben and I have made up.

FENWICK (*suspiciously*). When?

ELSIE. We were doing it when you came in. I couldn't bear to make you unhappy, Uncle, just when you were going away.

FENWICK. I thought the treatment would have some effect. The only way I have found to handle the younger generation is through a strict administration of the budget.

ELSIE. Uncle!

(Enter MAY at c. MAY is dressed in a distinctly modern version of the Serpent of the Nile. She wears an evening gown of some thin, clingy stuff, very short, very scant, very chic. Her hair is bobbed, and she wears slippers with French heels. Also carries a huge feather fan, which she handles in rather a Spanish fashion.)

FENWICK. Shades of Adam and Eve, what's this?

MAY (*quite unconcerned*). How do I look? Cleopatra, you know.

(BEN enters at L. ELSIE crosses to him.)

FENWICK (*in strong disapproval*). It looks to me like anything but the sort of thing a lady should appear in.

MAY. Well, Cleopatra was anything but a lady in my estimation.

(She flirts the fan and looks entirely satisfied with herself.)

ELSIE (*to BEN*). I told him we'd made up. It was the only way to keep him here. Did she go?

BEN (*grimly*). She went—with help.

FENWICK (*to BEN*). Well, my boy, I'm glad to hear Elsie has come to her senses. What are you supposed to be? William Tell?

(Enter ROBERT and DOROTHY at c., pushing the *vic-trola*.)

ROBERT. Hullo, Dad. Sorry I couldn't drive down for you, but I thought in this costume it wouldn't quite do.

DOROTHY. Good-evening, Mr. Fenwick.

FENWICK (*stiffly*). Good-evening. Robert, what is this I hear about my chauffeur?

ROBERT. Why, he—he—

ELsie (*decidedly*). He disappeared.

FENWICK. What!!!

BEN. And Elsie's ring has disappeared—

(He stops suddenly as Elsie steps violently on his foot.)

ROBERT. Why, you see, Dad, nobody knows much about it, but he's been acting queer all day—

FENWICK. I'll go out to the garage and—

ELsie. Ahem!! (*She nudges BEN.*)

BEN. No, don't; stay and see us rehearse.

DOROTHY. Yes, do, Mr. Fenwick.

ELsie (*aside, to ROBERT*). She's out there! Mrs. Badger!

FENWICK (*to DOROTHY*). Thanks, but I don't believe I feel equal to it to-night.

(Exit, c., *disgustedly*.)

ROBERT (*to ELSIE*). Did you say she was in the garage?

ELsie. Yes, I did. Now we *are* lost!

BEN. Why not make a clean breast of it to the old man?

BOTH. Don't be an idiot!

(In the meantime, DOROTHY and MAY have been adjusting the *vic-trola* and looking over the records.)

DOROTHY. Robert, you stay here and run the music while I start them from up-stairs. Nearly everybody's dressed but they have to be grouped.

Hurry up, all of you. (MAY runs off at c., followed by ELSIE and BEN.) Of course we can't do everything just right—your mother's to be drawn on a moving platform by four boy scouts, and they've all gone to a dance; but we'll do what we can. These are the ones you're to play.

ROBERT. All right.

(Exit DOROTHY. He puts on a record and starts it.)

DOROTHY (at door). Wait till I call to you. They're not ready yet.

(She disappears. He stops the machine.)

ROBERT. Gosh, I'll be glad when this blamed show is over and Dad's on the way to London! If I can only live till then —

(Enter ROSALIE at r.)

ROSALIE. Hist!!

ROBERT (jumping). My gosh!

ROSALIE. Mister Robert!

ROBERT. What do you want?

ROSALIE. Want know whar Romeo gone.

ROBERT (desperately). I don't know—nobody knows —we're busy and you've got to get out of here. I'll call you in the morning.

ROSALIE (decidedly). Mawnin' won' do. He done leave a note for me—jes' good-bye, dat's all. Whah's he at, Mister Robert, I wanter know?

ROBERT. I tell you I don't know. He got a wire from his mother saying she was coming to-day and he lit out.

ROSALIE (in horror). Mis' Amarilla Badger comin' hyah?

ROBERT. Worse'n that. She's here now—out in the garage. Will you go home?

VOICE. Start the music!

ROBERT. You clear out—it's all your fault —

ROSALIE. Oh, ma lan', I never did suppose dat ole

lady come way fum Pitfield jes' because we sen'
dat wiah! (She wrings her hands.)

ROBERT (hoarsely). Hurry!

(She runs off at r. He rushes at the victrola and winds it furiously. Enter DOROTHY, followed by ELSIE and BEN.)

DOROTHY. I said "start it," not wind it to pieces.
(He starts it—putting the needle down so that it gives a dismal wail.) What is the matter with you, Bob?

ROBERT. Nerves. Stage fright.

DOROTHY. Now, group yourselves, quick. (They do so.) Hold it till I see who's to come next.

(Exit DOROTHY. Enter ROSALIE.)

ROSALIE. Oh, my goodness, Mister Robert, she ain'
in de garage; she's settin' on de front steps!

ELsie. Merciful heavens!

(BEN stares at her in bewilderment.)

ROBERT (wildly). You've got to get out of here.
The den — (He stops the music.)

ELsie. Your father'll go in there!

BEN. Hide her under the table.

ROBERT. Here, duck in here for ten minutes till these people get out. Quick!

(ROSALIE crawls under the table at r.)

ELsie. They'll see her. Here—my cloak —

(With a triumphant glance at the apprehensive ROBERT she takes it off and throws it over the table, where it quite conceals ROSALIE. ELSIE is dressed in a pretty little evening dress, quite modest and charming.)

DOROTHY (darting in again). What's the matter with that music?

ROBERT. I must have stopped it by mistake.

(Starts it again.)

DOROTHY. Come on, Goddess of Liberty!

(MRS. FENWICK enters solemnly, carrying her torch, at c., and MR. FENWICK comes in at L.)

FENWICK. Great Cæsar's ghost!

DOROTHY. Hush, it's fine. Now, Cleopatra!

(Enter MAY in a wonderfully snaky Cleopatra-like pose. At the same time MRS. BADGER darts in at R. Sees MAY first.)

MRS. B. Lawd in his mussy, save us!

MAY (angrily). I knew somebody'd interrupt me!

ROBERT (throwing up his hands). It's all up!

FENWICK. Is this another picture? Or —

MRS. B. (indignantly). Don' you git sassy to me, white man! I ain't no picture, but I'se a puffec'ly respectable woman an' 'at's mo'n anybody else whut's aroun' hyah, lemme tell yo'.

MRS. F. It's Romeo's mother—I know it is. Perhaps she can tell us where he's gone —

MRS. B. No, ma'am, I cain't, but I got my suspicions. Dat boy done put me in de garage, but I ain't stay dere. I —

(In her growing excitement she clutches the cloak and exposes ROSALIE, who stares at everybody in horror.)

ROSALIE (crawling out). Oh, Mister Robert, save me! Dat ole scorpion git me fer sho'.

MRS. F. Rosalie!

ROSALIE (glibly). Mr. Robert he done hide me in yondah—yes, ma'am.

DOROTHY. Robert!

MRS. B. (triumphantly). I know'd dere was a yaller wench mixed up in hyah somewhere!!

TABLEAU

ACT III

(*Same setting. The following morning. As the curtain rises, MR. FENWICK appears at C., carrying a breakfast tray. ROBERT enters at L., wearing a kitchen apron and a look of aggravation. He enters just as MR. FENWICK has set the tray down on a chair and collapsed wearily into another.*)

ROBERT. Well?

FENWICK. Well?

ROBERT. Did Mother eat the eggs?

FENWICK (*wearily*). No. They were too hard. I told you she liked 'em three minutes by the clock.

ROBERT (*in irritation*). You didn't say which clock, and I never noticed that the kitchen one had stopped.

FENWICK. Humph!

ROBERT. What I want to know is, how much longer have I got to do the cooking for this house?

FENWICK. Until your mother gets over her nervous collapse or until that Swede shows up.

ROBERT. She'll never show up after swiping twenty dollars and vanishing with it.

FENWICK. It's my opinion that she never touched that money.

ROBERT. Then who did?

FENWICK. Romeo Badger.

ROBERT (*nervously*). Nonsense, Dad, that's absurd.

FENWICK. Why is it absurd? Didn't he need money? Didn't he telegraph that infuriated old person who's out in our garage that he was having an operation and had to have money? Well, he's not having an operation, is he?

ROBERT. How do we know? He might be. He —

FENWICK. Don't be an idiot. That wire was sent

two days ago and Romeo was here on the job yesterday morning. It's a nice situation. She swears she won't go until he turns up.

ROBERT. Gosh!

FENWICK (*rising*). Then there's Elsie's ring. When I get home from London I'll probe this affair to the roots. If it wasn't the most important kind of business, I'd change my reservations until next month — (*Hesitates.*)

ROBERT (*excitedly*). You mustn't think of it! Not for a moment! Never neglect your business for little things like family matters. Leave this to me!

FENWICK (*pityingly*). You!!

ROBERT (*ignoring his tone*). The worst part of it all is that Dorothy Stevens insists upon believing that that horrible manicure girl came here to flirt with me. Me!! When I told her she came after Romeo!

FENWICK (*in that soothing voice that parents sometimes adopt*). Well, well, my boy, if she's willing to think a thing like that of you, you're very much better off not married to her. A suspicious woman is a very unpleasant wife.

ROBERT. I don't care how unpleasant she is, I want her. Look here, Dad, if you think Romeo stole that money, why do you think Selma left?

FENWICK. Why do cooks always leave? Because they're bored, or want a change, or don't like the way the lady of the house does her hair—how do I know?

ROBERT. There's the bell, doggone it! (*He struggles with his apron, which refuses to come off.*) Oh, for goodness' sake, go and answer it!

FENWICK. At this rate, I'll miss my train, and if I miss my train —

(*Exit angrily at R.*)

ROBERT (*piously*). If you miss your train, the Lord help us!

(He gets the apron off and takes the tray to carry it off when ELSIE and MAY enter. They are in street dress and ELSIE looks tired out.)

ELsie. Oh, Bob, how are you standing it? Isn't everything too awful for words? Ben is outside. May and I ran in to see your dear mother. How is she?

ROBERT. In bed—like yours. There doesn't seem to be much stamina in our families, Elsie.

ELsie. Well, I'm sure I do my best. If older people will be so unreasonable, it isn't my fault.

(MAY, rather uninterested in the conversation, wanders about and ends up at the Victrola, where she sits and pulls over the records. She appears bored. ELSIE sits on couch. ROBERT has put the tray down and stands talking to ELSIE.)

ROBERT. That's what I say. The older ones started this row, all right. If Dad had given me that job —

ELsie. And hadn't docked my allowance —

ROBERT. And old Mrs. Badger hadn't been so set against Romeo's getting married —

ELsie. None of this would have happened. As it is, we're all in trouble. Romeo has disappeared —

ROBERT. And his mother insists on living in our garage —

ELsie. And I had to make up with Ben when I didn't want to or face the poorhouse.

ROBERT. Fortunately, Rosalie kept her mouth shut—nobody knows about that telegram.

MAY (waking up). Dorothy Stevens is so hopping mad at you that she says she'll never speak to you again.

ROBERT. It's a rotten shame. Somebody's got to tell her the truth.

ELsie. I tried to last night and she told me to hold my tongue.

MAY (coming down). That's the worst of telling the truth—it makes you so unpopular.

ROBERT. Look here, May, you're a nice little thing—when you want to be. Won't you try to bring Dorothy around?

MAY. It makes a difference when you want something. Last night you called me a "fresh flapper."

ROBERT (*humbly*). I wasn't myself last night, May, honest! It's lucky I didn't call you anything worse than that. If you'll put me right with Dorothy, I'll —

MAY (*coolly*). Well?

ROBERT. I'll give you a dinner—anywhere you say.

MAY. Honest?

ROBERT. Honest. Dorothy likes you, you know, and she —

MAY. After the theatre? Real late?

ROBERT. At three a. m. if you say so.

MAY. With flowers? And lobster? And two or three real lovely men?

ROBERT. Two or three men? Say, what are you? A young Mormon?

MAY. Well, if you're doing a thing, why not do it right? Make it snappy?

ROBERT. All right, Miss Brigham Young, you shall have a man on each side of you and one across the way, but you're to put me right with Dorothy? At once?

MAY. Well, it can't be done by telling the truth, that's a cinch. The truth makes you look too silly.

(*She meditates a moment.*)

ELSIE. It rather does, Bob, you know.

MAY. I'll tell her—that Rosalie and Romeo are secretly married and that you were protecting them from Mrs. Badger—and —

(*Enter FENWICK, followed by BEN.*)

ROBERT. Hush! His train goes in an hour.

BEN. Hullo, Bob, any more visitors?

('Phone rings. FENWICK goes to it, forestalling ROBERT, who starts.)

FENWICK. Hello? Yes, this is John Fenwick speaking. The police station!

ROBERT. Ouch!

FENWICK. Yes, Romeo Badger is my chauffeur.

(ROBERT picks up the tray of dishes and starts L.)

Is he missing? Yes, of course, he's missing—since yesterday.

BEN. I thought so. I said —

ELsie. Oh, do keep still!

FENWICK. What's that? Arrested for trying to pawn a lady's diamond ring? (ROBERT drops tray of dishes with a crash. FENWICK, to ROBERT.) Will you keep still so that I — (Into 'phone.) Yes, the ring's missing and some money. I'm leaving for New York in an hour. Can you bring him up to the house? Thanks. (Rings off. A horrified silence prevails.) Well, I'm sorry to hear that; I liked that boy. There's no accounting for young people these days. Well, I must get my bag packed.

(He starts to go at c. MAY suddenly bursts into tears.)

MAY. Oh! Oh!! Oh!!! (To ROBERT.) How can you be so dreadful!!

(She runs off at r.)

FENWICK. What the deuce —

ELsie. She's upset, poor child, by the excitement. That's all it is. I'm going up to see Aunt Ellen.

(Exit, c.)

FENWICK (savagely, to ROBERT). Do you know what this means?

ROBERT (blankly). I—I—how should I know what it means? I haven't any time to know what it means—I've got the dishes to do.

(*He grabs the tray and starts l. FENWICK, in exasperation, rushes off at c. ROBERT sinks into a chair, lets the tray slide.*)

BEN. Say, you've been rather a fool, haven't you?

ROBERT (*savagely*). What do you know about it?

BEN. Elsie gave us the particulars coming over.

ROBERT. That's right. Blame a chap because a thing goes wrong. If it had succeeded, I'd have been a clever guy—full of initiative.

BEN. Well, it's rather rough on Romeo.

ROBERT. I'm going to pull Romeo out somehow. Oh, if they'd only waited an hour—just one little merciful hour!

BEN. Well, they didn't. Poor devil!

ROBERT. I tell you — (*In exasperation.*) Where do you get that "poor devil" stuff? I tell you I'm —

BEN. I don't mean Romeo; I mean you. That policeman will be here in half an hour and, of course, Romeo'll tell everything he knows. I would, myself.

ROBERT (*angrily*). Look here, Ben Craig —

(*Enter SELMA quietly at r. She wears an odd-looking hat and coat and has a dejected and weary look.*)

BEN. Oh, I say, look who's here!

ROBERT (*jumping up*). Selma! Great Scott!

SELMA (*smiling wanly*). Ay didn't find place.

ROBERT. What?

SELMA. Ay went hunt for place but all the good ones bane gone.

ROBERT. Look here, you mean you went to look for another place to work?

SELMA (*nods*). Ay bane tired this place. Ay go hunt in advertisements, but Ay come back. Such a many girl looking for place. This place better than not'ing, Ay tank.

BEN. Then she didn't take —

ROBERT (*seizing her by the arm*). You sit down and

look me in the eye. (SELMA eyes him blankly.)
You didn't light out with that money, eh?

SELMA. What money? Ay ain't see no money.

ROBERT. Then why didn't you come back last night
when you didn't find a place?

SELMA (*sadly*). Ay go by my cousin's house and my
cousin she give me somet'ing her man made in a
bottle and Ay bane sick. Ach, sick, sick, sick —

(*Her pantomime begins to be expressive.*)

ROBERT (*stopping her hurriedly*). All right, never
mind that. You go into the kitchen and make
some coffee—a whole lot of—a pailful. Some of
this family haven't tasted decent food for twenty-
four hours. Savvy?

SELMA (*grinning*). Yah, I get you.

(*Exit at c.*)

ROBERT. Ben, that girl never touched the money.

BEN. Looks to me too green to take anything—ex-
cept moonshine.

ROBERT. She'd never come back if she had. But
how —

BEN. Romeo?

ROBERT. Nonsense. He's been left in the house a
hundred times. He's as honest as she is.

BEN. Then who —

ROBERT (*suddenly*). Ben, it's that girl—Rosalie!

BEN. Huh?

ROBERT (*rapidly*). Why didn't we think of it before?
She was in the room alone long enough to steal
the piano if she'd wanted to.

BEN. But she came back, too.

ROBERT. Yes, after she'd thrown the suspicion on
Selma, and Selma had quit. (*Goes to 'phone.*)
Central 2440.

BEN. What are you going to do?

ROBERT. Wait and see. Hello! That you, Rosalie?
This is Robert Fenwick. Mother would like to
have you come over and give her a massage. She

isn't well. What? No, Mrs. Badger isn't here. Gone home. I've got something to tell you about Romeo.

(*Rings off. Enter ELSIE as he is 'phoning.*)

ELSIE. Robert, Aunt Ellen wants you.

ROBERT (*to BEN*). If she comes while I'm gone, kid her along. Don't let her get away.

(*Exit, c.*)

ELSIE. What's he up to now?

BEN. Trying to clear Romeo. Selma's back. She didn't take the money.

ELSIE. Do you suppose Romeo —

BEN. Either he or Juliet. Bob's going to find out which.

ELSIE. Oh, dear, isn't everything awful? Uncle's so savage that I didn't have the courage to tell him we were only pretending to be made up, Ben. I'm going to wait and write it to him.

BEN. What do you mean by pretending? I wasn't pretending.

ELSIE. Oh, yes, you were, Ben, we both were. I only told him we'd made up because I didn't want him to go to the garage when Romeo's mother was there. You knew I didn't mean it.

BEN. No, I didn't. I meant it and I supposed you did.

ELSIE. Why, Ben, how could you? The circumstances hadn't changed a particle.

BEN. What circumstances?

ELSIE. Why, your being so unsuited to me, and all that.

BEN. I don't consider that I'm unsuited to you. What's the matter with me?

ELSIE. The matter with you? Oh, you serpent!

BEN. Yes. My family is all right. I've got as much money as you have. My habits are reasonably good and my health is fine—except for hay fever which I only have in August. I —

ELsie. Don't be funny. It isn't becoming to you.

Ben. I'm not funny. I mean business. I demand to know why I'm not suited to you?

(Raps severely with his fist on the arm of a chair.)

ELsie (a little surprised). Yesterday you said you liked your freedom; you know you did.

Ben. I've had enough of it. I find that I travel better in harness. Besides, you have no right to patch up our engagement before people and then break it again. It reflects on my character.

ELsie. Your character!!

Ben. Of course. Folks wonder what I've been up to. Nobody'll ever marry me after that.

ELsie. I never heard such nonsense.

Ben. It isn't nonsense. Either keep your word and marry me next Tuesday or I sue you for defamation of character.

ELsie. You can't. Gentlemen don't do such things.

Ben. Then it's time they began. I shall be a pioneer. I shall sue you for \$20,000. I guess that'll put a dent in your allowance.

ELsie. I never heard of anything so dreadful in all my life. Ben, I despise you for this.

Ben. Of course, if you prefer to *pay* me—but I should think it would cripple you a bit.

ELsie. Cripple me! It will ruin me.

Ben. Well, there's an easy way out.

(He comes closer to her.)

ELsie (in tears). Oh, oh, oh—

Ben. Think it over, dearest. Isn't it better to be a rich man's darling than an impoverished spinster?

ELsie (falling on his shoulder). Oh, Ben, how could you treat me so? You said you cared for me.

Ben. I do—when you behave yourself.

ELsie. There's the door-bell!

(Breaking away from him. ROBERT enters at c.)

ROBERT. If that's Rosalie, you folks step outside those curtains, but don't go away. I may need you.

(Exit at R.)

ELSIE. Rosalie? What is he doing now?

BEN. Hatching up more trouble. He's got a genius for it.

ELSIE. Hush, here she comes.

(They step behind the portières as ROBERT enters, followed by ROSALIE, pert and smiling as ever.)

ROBERT. Come in. Mother's not quite ready for you. Better sit down.

ROSALIE (looking around a little uneasily). Mister Robert, you sure dat ole lady's gone?

ROBERT. Sure.

ROSALIE (sitting). She mos' scare me to death las' night. Ain' Romeo come back yit?

ROBERT. No, but Selma has.

ROSALIE. Dat Swede girl?

ROBERT. Yes. She didn't take that money after all.

ROSALIE (sharply). How you know dat?

ROBERT. Because they've just 'phoned from the police station that Romeo has been arrested for stealing the money and a diamond ring of Miss Evans'.

ROSALIE (promptly). My lan', ain't dat boy got awful bad? Stealin' money an' rings bofe? An' me goin' out wif him all dis time. Did—did dey fin' it on him?

ROBERT. They found the ring. He tried to pawn it.

ROSALIE. I'll jus' bet he done spen' it on dem craps. He's jes' a awful boy for craps, Mister Robert. Ain' I glad I'm thoo with him—an' his ole mother, too.

ROBERT. Yes, but you see, we don't believe Romeo took the money.

ROSALIE (sharply). How come you don't?

ROBERT. Because we know you took it.

ROSALIE (*rising*). Me!! Go long wif your foolin',
Mister Robert, you're plumb crazy in de haid.

ROBERT. Not at all. I know it.

ROSALIE (*angrily*). How you know it? Was you
thah?

ROBERT. Certainly. Behind that curtain.

ROSALIE (*shaken*). Look hyah, Mister Robert, yo'
cain' take a woman's character away lak dat jes'
because she ain' white. Nossuh.

ROBERT. Look here, Rosalie, you were alone in this
room with the money. Selma can prove to any-
body's satisfaction that she didn't do it. Not
even a dumb Swede would be fool enough to take
money, run away and then come back again.
Romeo's character is established. So —

ROSALIE. But dat ring he done took?

ROBERT. My cousin gave it to him. If I have to ex-
plain to the police I will. You haven't a ghost of
a show. You sign this paper admitting that you
took the twenty dollars or I tell the police every-
thing. You can hand over the money, too. I've
got witnesses in that room.

ROSALIE. Come now, Mister Robert, what you got
'ginst me, anyhow? I didn't touch yo' ole money.

ROBERT. All right. If you want me to start the po-
lice on your trail. I was going to let you go.
But —

ROSALIE (*weakening*). Who's in 'at room?

ROBERT. Friends of mine. We'll play fair if you do.

ROSALIE (*hesitating—then diving into her stocking*
and producing the money). Well, oh, take your
ole money. No business leavin' it undah folkses'
nose, anyhow.

ROBERT. You're right. Thank you. Same bills?

ROSALIE (*angrily*). An' yo' kin tell 'at low-down no-
account nigger house boy dat I don't want nothin'
mo' to do wif him, nohow. I'se gwine marry a
genelman wif money of his own.

ELSIE (*running in*). Robert, wasn't that the bell
again? It must be the policeman with Romeo.

ROSALIE (*panic-stricken*). Policeman! Oh, Lawdy, Lawdy!!!

ROBERT (*taking her by the arm*). Out the back way, quick!

(*Exit ROSALIE rapidly at L.*)

ELSIE. Robert, you're wonderful.

BEN. Reg'lar little private detective. I thought she had it all the time.

ROBERT. Oh, did you, indeed? How clever of you.

(*Enter SELMA, scared, at R.*)

SELMA. Policeman! Policeman! Romeo he bane pinched!

ROBERT. Well, show 'em in. (*Exit SELMA, wide-eyed and scared. He goes to door at c.*) Hello, Dad, the cop's here.

(*Enter ROMEO, his arm in the clutch of a policeman.*)

ROMEO. You tak' yo' han's off me. I tell you, I ain't touch 'at money. Mister Robert, sir, you jes' tell dis pusson —

POLICEMAN. That'll do for you. You can talk when we get ready to hear you.

ELSIE (*summoning up her courage*). Well, I can talk if I want to, and I tell you he didn't steal my ring. I gave it to him.

(*Enter FENWICK at c., followed by MRS. FENWICK.*)

FENWICK (*in horror*). You gave your engagement ring to my colored chauffeur? Am I out of my head?

BEN. Elsie!

ROMEO. Yassir, she did. She give it to me to disappear on.

MRS. F. (*weakly*). To disappear on!

ROBERT (*hurriedly*). One minute—just one minute. I can explain everything.

POLICEMAN. You're a clever little guy, ain't you?

ROBERT. Not very, but I've got you skinned. I found the person who took the money. I made her give it back, too.

FENWICK. She? Then it *was* that Swede?

(Enter MRS. BADGER at L. from garage; sees ROMEO.)

MRS. B. So dere you is? "Under ether but will live." Yassir, I reckon you is gwine live when I git holt of you.

POLICEMAN. What's the matter with you? This man's under charge of stealing twenty dollars and a diamond ring.

MRS. B. (*indignantly*). Stealin'? What's the mattah wif *you*, white man? Dat boy ain' never stole a cent in his life! Don' I know dat boy? Ain' I brung him up? Don't I —

ROBERT. Listen, all of you. Rosalie stole the money and confessed to me five minutes ago and returned it. Here it is.

MRS. F. Rosalie!

ROMEO (*blankly*). What's dat?

MRS. B. (*scornfully*). I could have tole you dat easy. I been lookin' dat gal up all day. She ain' no good. She been honeyin' up to you, an' all de time she been gittin' ready to run off wif dat delicatessum man whut was caught makin' whisky. Dat's why she wanted you to buy 'at sto'.

ROMEO (*wildly*). Whut!! Lemme get at dat gal— lemme —

POLICEMAN. You dry up!

MRS. B. 'At's a mighty nice cosy little delicatessum sto'. I done buy it myse'f. I'se tired livin' in de country an' I reckon dis yere boy needs somebody to keep an eye on him, he's jes' dat green.

BEN. But the ring —

FENWICK (*to POLICEMAN*). We won't need you any more. We'll keep the rest of this in the family, I guess.

(He hands the man a couple of cigars.)

POLICEMAN. All right. If you don't want to prosecute —

(*He goes off at R.*)

FENWICK. Now, Robert —

ROBERT. Why —

MRS. B. Whut I wants to know is, who sen' me dis yere telegram?

ROMEO. Why —

ELSIE. Why, Uncle dear, it was like this — (ROBERT *groans*. Enter DOROTHY; stops at R.) You told Robert that he must show a bit of initiative so that you could give him that job; and Dorothy told him to try his hand on some little near at hand thing and promote it. (ROMEO *groans*.) So he tried to help Romeo by suggesting that it was too bad he couldn't get appendicitis so that his mother would send him some money; and that wretched Rosalie went and sent the telegram. It's all her fault.

DOROTHY. Oh, Bob, was that really all? That's what May said!

FENWICK. All? I'm disgusted with you, Robert. Absolutely disgusted.

MRS. B. (*venomously*). You Romeo—you march right out into dat garage, sir. I'll settle wif you immegitly.

(*Exit ROMEO and MRS. BADGER at L., she holding him sternly by the arm.*)

FENWICK. As for you, sir, the less initiative you cultivate in the future the better. My business isn't frenzied finance—it's old-fashioned and legitimate! I see I have been mistaken in you. I'll take you on as salesman if Mrs. Stevens will promise to keep an eye on you; but don't—for the Lord's sake—don't try to be brilliant. Stop before you land in the penitentiary.

ROBERT (*humbly*). Yes, sir.

FENWICK (*looking at his watch*). Gad, I'm late!
Romeo! I'll miss that blamed train yet!

(*Dashes out, followed by MRS. FENWICK.*)

ROBERT. Dorothy, you're an angel and I'm a fool.
Will you take me?

DOROTHY. There's nothing the matter with you, dear,
except that you're temperamental.

(*They embrace.*)

BEN. Temperamental? Gosh, ain't that enough?

ELSIE. Ben, you'd better go right down and unpawn
my engagement ring. I need it.

(*They embrace. Enter SELMA at c.*)

SELMA. The coffee bane made.

CURTAIN



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THE OXFORD AFFAIR. A Comedy in Three Acts, by JOSEPHINE H. COBB and JENNIE E. PAINE. For eight female characters. Plays one hour and three-quarters. Scenes, interiors at a seaside hotel. Costumes, modern. The action of the play is located at a summer resort. Alice Graham, in order to chaperon herself, poses as a widow, and Miss Oxford first claims her as a sister-in-law, then denounces her. The onerous duties of Miss Oxford, who attempts to serve as chaperon to Miss Howe and Miss Ashton in the face of many obstacles, furnish an evening of rare enjoyment.

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